DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 462 EA 020 224

AUTHOR D'Amico, Joseph J.
TITLE Strategic Planning for Educational Reform and Improvement.
INSTITUTION Research for Better Schools, Inc., Philadelphia, Pa.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 56p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; *Educational Change; Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; Policy Formation; *School Based Management; *School Organization
IDENTIFIERS *Strategic Planning; Strategic Planning for Educ Reform and Improvement

ABSTRACT

This paper applies the strategic planning process to the task of school renewal and improvement. After outlining the basic elements of stratgic planning (planning-to-plan phase, research, writing a mission statement, forecasting, contingency planning, and development of the strategic plan), the paper focuses on using this model to restructure schools. The policy formulation used, SPERI (Strategic Planning for Educational Reform and Improvement), is a set of manageable, concise procedures designed to help educators formulate effective policies. It is conceived of as a rational change process. The system was tested on three schools as case studies. Included are detailed descriptions of the three schools as they implemented this model, with the assistance of the developers, and with particular attention given to contrasts in the way each client group interpreted and adjusted the SPERI components to fit local context, politics, and values. In conclusion, it is noted that local contexts cause variations in the implementation and outcomes of the system. The flexibility required is also discussed. References are appended. (LMS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED297462

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND IMPROVEMENT

by

Joseph J. D'Amico
Research for Better Schools, Inc.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ellen Newcombe

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 1988.

EA 020 224

The work upon which this publication is based was funded in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

c Copyright Research for Better Schools; all rights reserved.

Introduction

Recent years have seen the publication of dozens of reports calling for renewal and improvement in America's schools. And schools and districts, in ever increasing numbers, are responding (Bickel, 1983). This is indeed a time of great activity as regards school improvement, but it appears that quite a few districts and schools are undertaking improvement efforts with little or no data -- and even less planning -- to support or justify them or the policies that underlie them. It is a "crises-requires-reform scenario" (Kirst & Meister, 1985) for many; another case of policy-makers basing their decisions on considerations other than data (Lindbloom & Cohen, 1979; Weiss, 1980). Consequently, many of these reforms and improvements wither and die making school staff, students, and parents cynical about reform and its value (Deal, 1984).

With this situation in mind, staff at Research for Better Schools, Inc. (RBS) have designed a data-based, strategic planning system to assist educational policy-makers develop improvement agendas, collect and analyze information, and plan effective programs for school improvement and renewal (D'Amico, 1988). This system, Strategic Planning for Educational Reform and Improvement (SPERI), combines process characteristic of strategic planning in the private sector with structures that support data-based planning in educational settings.

*The author wishes to thank Nadine Fernandez, Gretchen Rossman, and Bruce Wilson for their help in developing this paper.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning has had a long history. Its origins are military and it has been used by generals to help them formulate battles for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years (Quinn, 1980). Around the turn of the twentieth century, its value for international policy was recognized and strategic planning became a commonly used geopolitical decision making tool (Mahan, 1890, Makinder, 1919). It was adopted as a corporate planning process in the mid-twentieth century and introduced to the public, not-for-profit sector shortly thereafter (VonNeuman & Morgenstern, 1947, Wilkinson, 1986). Educators began using strategic planning in the early 1970's (Cope, 1981; Schendel and Hatten, 1972). Today, strategic planning is the dominant management planning paradigm in North America (Hurst, 1986).

But what is strategic planning? One of America's leading experts on strategic planning, George Steiner (1979), says there is no clear consensus among those writing about the topic. However, he and others have described several themes underlying strategic planning. These themes represent the key principles and beliefs upon which this planning process is based:

- We can influence the future. Strategic planners believe that what is done today can help shape what happens tomorrow, next year, and even next decade.

- Today's trends can help us anticipate the future. Strategic planners believe that many current events presage future events. By "reading" the trends shown in these current events and extrapolating from them, we can describe a limited number of probable alternative future scenarios--outline descriptions of what will happen in years to come.

- Today's decisions can help us realize the future scenario that is best for us. Strategic planners believe that with a series of systematically-arrived at decisions and plans we can exploit opportunities, avoid pitfalls, and bring about a desired future.

Authors writing in the field have named a number of elements and activities that characterize the strategic planning process. One such element is a preliminary planning phase often called "planning to plan." In this phase the strategic planning process is being set up. Top management is coming to an understanding of the process and deciding who will be involved. They are creating work plans, setting timelines, and allocating financial and human resources to the task. They are defining roles and assigning responsibilities to planners.

Another important element of the strategic planning process is research. The research phase usually begins with the development of hypotheses about current status and future possibilities. In its initial stages this research phase depends largely on the experiences, hunches, and "gut feelings" of the top managers and planners. Although not technically based on "hard" data the hypotheses that come from this early stage of research are solid enough to be used to guide more systematic data collection and analysis. As strategic planners move to these more systematic data collection activities they use both qualitative and quantitative techniques to gather information about the world around them, their organization, even their own values and biases. The data gained is used to test hypotheses generated earlier.

Mission statement is also an important strategic planning element. The mission statement is a rationale which describes the organization's purpose and objectives. Most authors writing about strategic planning define the mission statement as the answer to the question, "What are we about?" They go on to say that usually it includes what the organization does, how it

does it, and why it does it. Once written, the mission statement becomes a cornerstone for the remaining strategic planning elements and activities.

Forecasting, another important strategic planning activity, is the development of several alternative predictions about the future. These predictions, also called future scenarios by some, are extrapolations and educated guesses that strategic planners base on the research information they have collected and analyzed. The predictions can be broad--describing world-wide events--or they can be narrow--dealing with local conditions or markets. In all cases, however, they include reference to likely effects on the organization. As part of the forecasting activities strategic planners also usually calculate the probability of each alternative future coming true. This is done either quantitatively or qualitatively.

Potential organizational reactions are at the heart of still another strategic planning element, contingency planning. Using their alternative future scenarios, strategic planners "play out" different ways their organization could respond to each alternative. They evaluate the consequences of each response and plot a series of tactical options for their organization. They then develop hypothetical policies that lead to smooth, successful implementation of each option. The goal here is to create a portfolio of policies that minimize negative consequences to the organization and maximize positive ones.

The strategic plan is the last element and the product of the strategic planning process. It is a description of the organization's mission and its most advantageous future scenario along with the policies and tactics needed to realize that future within the context of the mission. Although fairly

comprehensive, the strategic plan is not necessarily detailed. It does not, for example, need to include specific operational considerations such as program personnel, budgets, or milestones. These considerations often are left to program managers as they develop action plans for their units. Neither is the strategic plan immutable. It is subject to revisions when necessary. Many experts in the field recommend on-going, periodic review and revision.

And this recommendation leads to a final key principle of strategic planning: it is more important as a process than as a product. The value, for its advocates, is in its philosophy more than anything else. As George Steiner puts it, "...strategic planning is an attitude, a way of life. (It) necessitates dedication to acting on the basis of contemplation of the future, a determination to plan constantly and systematically as an integral part of management. Strategic planning is more of a thought process, an intellectual exercise, than a prescribed set of processes, procedures, structures, or techniques."

Educational Strategic Planning

Among those writing in the field of strategic planning there exists great consensus that the strategic planning procedures developed for the private sector cannot be translated directly into the public sector. There are just too many structural differences between the two sectors. For one thing, private sector strategic planning is top-down: initiated and monitored by the chief executive officer, an individual answerable to virtually no one save the stockholders (Halachmi, 1986; Steiner, 1979). In the public sector, particularly in education, no such individual exists. School

district superintendents have some of the same responsibilities as corporate CEO's, but they do not have the same kind of authority.

Also corporate strategic planning is profit-driven. That is, its whole reason for existence is enhancement of the financial bottom line (Halachmi, 1986; Horner, 1979). Bottom line historically has not been a viable concept in the public sector (except recently, with the establishment of for-profit health care and child care facilities). The concept is particularly foreign in education where even productivity and measures of excellence are ill-defined notions.

In addition, politics is a much more influential factor in planning in the public sector than it is in the private (Cope, 1981; Horner, 1979). And partly because of this political ingredient, the atmosphere for public sector planning tends to be more reactive than its private sector counterpart (Halachmi, 1986; Walter, 1983).

Therefore, reason the experts, any strategic planning model used in the public sector is (and should be) a modification of the corporate strategic planning model (Cope, 1981; Halachmi, 1986; Horner, 1979; Steiner, 1979; Walter, 1983; Wilkinson, 1986). Furthermore, they argue, educational strategic planning models are (and should be) even more unique because the constraints operating on educational policy-making and decision-making are unique. For instance:

- politics may dominate policy
- decision-making is incremental
- latitude in policy is narrow
- policy constituency is broader and more involved
- lines of authority are not clearly defined

- participative decision-making is the norm

(Cope, 1981)

Moreover, there are many more "givens", contextual constraints, operating in the educational milieu. Staff, budget caps, and laws are three obvious examples. Building or land restrictions, and client characteristics, are two less obvious ones.

Because of the contextual constraints and parameters on policy in education, the challenge for educational strategic planners is to understand the internal and external boundaries and to use this understanding to design policies that will position the resources under their control--programs, budget lines, staff, goals, and so forth--to maximize educational excellence. All this suggests that a strategic planning model that stresses understanding of forces and positioning of resources is the most useful one for education.

Strategic Planning for Educational Reform and Improvement

Strategic Planning for Educational Reform and Improvement (SPERI) is such a model. Its philosophical roots lie in this notion of educational excellence through understanding and positioning; but it is much more than an intellectual exercise. SPERI is a policy formulation system that applies the elements of strategic planning to schools and school systems. It is more than simply a thought process, it is a tool to assist top educational administrators anticipate changes in their environments and plan appropriate, responsive policy alternatives for dealing with them.

In contrast to many corporate strategic planning systems, SPERI is a set of manageable, concise procedures specifically designed to help educators formulate effective, future-oriented policies. These procedures are

clustered in four SPERI components: Planning to Plan, Focused Issues Assessment, Targeted Research and Tailored Policy Analysis. Each component helps planners meet a set of objectives and each results in a different set of outcomes. Used in combination, the SPERI components help educational planners arrive at effective strategic plans for their school or district by leading them through a rational, policy-oriented planning system.

Planning to Plan

Planning to Plan is the first SPERI component and it is the "bottom-up" part of strategic planning (Ecker, 1986). The objectives of Planning to Plan are to develop a team of committed planners who understand the strategic planning process and to arrive at a negotiated contract with them. This contract specifies planning team roles and responsibilities as well as the prerequisites and support systems necessary to accomplish the SPERI effort (Steiner, 1979; Webster, 1985).

The development of this contract is a vital first step in conducting SPERI. It insures that all participants in the strategic planning effort will have a mutual understanding of what is to take place, who is to do it, and what they can expect in the way of human, material, and financial assistance (Oberhammer, 1986). Moreover, the outcome of Planning to Plan--the SPERI contract among top management and the members of the planning team--can be used as a kind of action plan for the remainder of the SPERI effort.

Planning to Plan is initiated by top management. They specifically define the intended strategic planning activities, outline the scope of the strategic planning effort, set its schedule and budget, and create a strategic planning team. They also establish an understanding of and

commitment to their strategic planning effort among the key planners on the strategic planning team. The outcomes of Planning to Plan are:

- a motivated, committed strategic planning team that understands the goals of strategic planning, in general, and the objectives of their strategic planning effort, in particular; and
- a SPERI contract among top management and the strategic planning team members detailing the strategic planning effort.

These outcomes represent a GO/NO GO decision point in SPERI. If a strategic planning team cannot be assembled nor a suitable SPERI contract negotiated, the process should not continue. It will not succeed (Steiner, 1979). These outcomes also set the stage for the next component, Focused Issues Assessment.

Focused Issues Assessment

Focused Issues Assessment is the second component of SPERI. In this component, the planning team arrives at a finite list of clearly specified issues to be addressed during the course of the strategic planning effort. There are two objectives for Focused Issues Assessment: to analyze the current situation and create the list itself and to develop comfortable working relationships among planning team members.

The importance of the first objective is well documented among strategic planning experts. Lilly (1984), for instance, states that the success of any subsequent strategic planning is questionable without the information that comes from the creation of such a list of specific issues--and from the situation analysis that goes with its creation. Steiner (1979) refers to it as being essential. He and Cope (1981) both point out that it is perhaps the only formal opportunity that the planning team has to influence top

management by providing information necessary for establishing priorities and objectives.

The second objective of Focused Issues Assessment, the establishment of a productive working relationship, is of almost equal importance (Broms & Gahmberg, 1983; Steiner, 1979). Establishing such a relationship benefits the strategic planning effort itself, by laying a groundwork of candor, communication, delegation, and cooperation upon which subsequent planning activities are built. There is payoff beyond this, however. For once set up, these relationships tend to continue and facilitate internal coordination of the operational activities that come from the strategic planning effort (Cleveland, 1981; Steiner, 1979).

Focused Issues Assessment begins with the articulation of a mission statement, an agreed-upon, general vision of the way things should be (Halachmi, 1986; Raze, 1986; Steiner, 1979). Using this statement as a touchstone, the planning team analyzes the situation, contrasting "what is" with "what should be" and hypothesizing reasons for any discrepancies (Amara, 1980). In the course of this analysis opportunities, threats, and challenges are shaken out and put into priority order (Camillus, 1986). Finally, they are re-defined as a research agenda for the Targeted Research Study. Thus the outcomes of the Focused Issues Assessment component of SPERI are:

- an articulated mission statement, agreed-upon by the planning team and top management;
- a list of clearly defined issues--in priority order--to be addressed by strategic planners; and
- a research agenda for examining the issues and gauging their magnitude, importance, and urgency.

Targeted Research

Targeted Research, the most scientific SPERI component, is an implementation of the research agenda. The stress is on getting a better understanding of the current and future impact of the issues identified in Focused Issues Assessment. Although the notion of conducting research to clarify impact permeates nearly all fields of inquiry, the rationales and procedures of this SPERI component are derived from marketing, management, and general systems theories (Camillus, 1986; Cope, 1981) as well as from educational planning (Sirotnik & Oakes, 1986).

Armed with their list of issue priorities, the members of the strategic planning team--or their delegates--examine their own organization and the environment in which it exists. They collect qualitative and quantitative data to clarify the true effect of each issue and to extrapolate several different predictions of what the future might bring. The data gathering and analysis techniques they use come from many diverse fields such as economics, political science, risk management, sociology, and anthropology (O'Conner, 1978; Pearce & Robinson, 1982; Sellitz, Wrightsman & Cook, 1976; Steiner, 1979; Wilkinson, 1986).

The first objective of Targeted Research is to gain, with some precision, an additional understanding of the impact, urgency, and importance of each issue identified during Focused Issues Assessment. The second is to use this understanding to re-evaluate the issues and their priority and to project various ways to respond to each one. There are two outcomes of Targeted Research:

- a possibly revised, re-prioritized list of issues to be addressed by strategic planners along with data-based summaries detailing the magnitude, urgency, and importance of each;

- a set of alternative future scenarios (outlines of different responses to each issue) and associated tactical contingencies (operational plans for responding).

At this point the planning team is ready to turn the strategic planning effort back to top management for the next component, Tailored Policy Analysis. This final SPERI component involves using the future scenarios for policy assessment and revision.

Tailored Policy Analysis

The final SPERI component is Tailored Policy Analysis and it is the culmination of strategic planning. Top management, often in cooperation with members of the planning team, sort through the research information, the future scenarios, and the tactical contingencies to create a portfolio of policy options. The objective of Tailored Policy Analysis is to analyze current policy and adjust it, where necessary, to meet new objectives that have been derived from desirable future scenarios (Hurst, 1986; Lilly, 1984; Steiner, 1979). In the course of this analysis adjustments also may be made in the mission statement: aligning it more closely to the demands of the future scenarios, for example.

The initial step of Tailored Policy Analysis requires that top management scrutinize the alternative futures submitted by the planning team after their Targeted Research. These managers then select a limited number and ascertain how current policy configurations contribute to or prevent realization of these preferred future scenarios. In doing this they also re-examine and re-evaluate organizational resource capabilities and structures and the organizational mission itself. The major questions for consideration during Tailored Policy Analysis are: Where do we want to be? What's helping us or holding us back? What should be changed?

The outcomes of the Tailored Policy Analysis are a set of policy recommendations which include suggestions for operational planning and implementation. The recommendations are keyed to present decisions but grounded in future impact.

The submission of these policy recommendations signals the completion of Strategic Planning for Educational Reform and Improvement. The next step is adoption of the recommendations (or not) and implementation of a set of concomitant policy changes. In most educational settings this moves the process from a strictly management activity to one that is political.

SPERI in Action

The SPERI system is a change process and its developers like to think of it as a rational change process. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, however; and the proof of SPERI as a planning system is in its use for planning. The opportunity to test the system's usefulness as a planning tool came soon after its development. Within six months of a decision to offer SPERI to a limited number of RBS' regional clients as a pilot test of the process, two school districts and one school requested planning assistance. RBS staff decided to present each with the option of using SPERI as their planning model with the expectation that their use of the system would be chronicled for later use as case studies (Yin, 1984). All three agreed.

Theoretical Framework and Methods

RBS staff, working as participant observers, were looking at SPERI first and foremost as a change process. Thus they grounded their examination of the system's implementation in issues raised by others studying change, for example:

- What influence will the style and degree of involvement of the chief administrator exert on the success of the SPERI system (Crandall, et al., 1982; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Fullan, 1982)?
- What are the bureaucratic and problem-solving incentives for carrying out the SPERI process to a successful conclusion and how important are they to the staff involved (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Fullan, 1982)?
- To what degree do the local culture and values influence how the SPERI process is carried out and whether it is successful (Beyer & Trice, 1987; Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984; Deal & Kennedy, 1982)?

- How important were internal and external linkages to the successful implementation of the SPERI systems (Corbett, et al., 1984; Crandall, et al., 1982; Fullan, 1982)?

- What adaptations did local staff make to the SPERI system to make it more appropriate for local context and in what ways did the system cause staff to alter their behavior, values, or culture (Beyer & Trice, 1987; Corbett, et al., 1984; Fullan, 1982)?

- How did local staff use the SPERI system and the information they gained from it to plan and carry out school improvement (Dawson & D'Amico, 1985; Gold, 1983; Ballard & James, 1983).

Information was collected through observations, interviews, and analysis of documents. The observations were conducted at each site during planning and policy-making meetings. Face to face interviews were conducted with both meeting participants and others involved in policy decisions. Documents generated as a result of SPERI processes -- eg., minutes of meetings, research designs and data, policy position drafts, and the like -- were examined as they were produced at each site. Lastly, documents detailing telephone conversations and interviews collected as a consequence of RBS' corporate self-assessment activities were scrutinized as well. Document analyses, observations, and interviews were guided by lists of information categories designed to help RBS staff identify local manifestations of significant planning, implementation, and policy formulation issues (such as those listed above) and how these issues were resolved in each case.

What follows are three case descriptions of the SPERI system as it was carried out by three of RBS' regional clients. They chronicle the clients' implementation of the SPERI components with particular attention to contrasts in the way each client group interpreted and adjusted the SPERI model to fit local context, politics, values, and the like.

Miltonville School District

Miltonville is a medium-sized Northeastern city with ten schools: four K-6 elementary, four K-8 elementary, one 7-8 middle school, and one high school. There are approximately 9,000 students enrolled in these Miltonville schools; and, although the city's population is a diverse one racially and ethnically, the student body of Miltonville's schools is mostly black and Hispanic. There is racial and ethnic balance among the Miltonville teaching staff as there is on the city's board of education. Miltonville's building and central office administration, however, is overwhelmingly white. It is also overwhelmingly male.

In the superintendent's words, Miltonville's schools were, at the time, "bursting at the seams." The city's student population had been steadily growing as families from nearby, more economically depressed cities arrived in search of better employment opportunities for themselves and better educational opportunities for their children. This might have been a happy situation, but the last Miltonville school building was constructed in the mid 1920's and every school in the city was overcrowded. In fact, many of the schools were not in compliance with state school occupancy regulations. In recent years, the overcrowding had become worse for two reasons. The first was related to the fact that state regulations governing special programs restricted both the class size and classroom size permitted for special education students. There were many special students to be served in Miltonville and thus, there were many small classes being held in large classrooms and -- as the administration saw it -- space was being under-utilized in many schools.

Another factor contributing to overcrowing was transient students. Miltonville is seen as a high quality school district by those living in surrounding communities. Many families from these communities sent their children to live with relatives in Miltonville to enable them to go to Miltonville's schools. Quite a few simply sent their children across district boundaries without establishing local residence for them. Estimates of these legal and illegal out-of-district enrollees ranged from 30 percent for K-6 to over 40 percent in the higher grades. In addition to straining the already over-crowded school buildings, these extra students were straining the district's special programs as many of them needed remedial, bilingual, or special education assistance.

RBS consultants were contacted by the Miltonville superintendent in the spring of 1986. He had heard the SPERI system described at a meeting of state urban superintendents and felt it had the potential to help his administrative management team clarify and begin attacking some of these problems.

Planning to Plan

The superintendent's goal for the first meeting with RBS staff was to have them outline the SPERI system for his top advisors: the assistant superintendent, the directors of special and government programs, and the reading, language arts, and math supervisors. After doing this, RBS consultants asked those present to describe the district and identify the district's major problems as they saw them. Among the many discussed there seemed to be strong consensus that the following three problems were most urgent:

- Crowded facilities coupled with reluctance on the part of the community to support a building effort.

- Inordinate amounts of time, money, and energy being spent on serving the special needs of transient, out-of-district students.

- Political tension between the largely white school administration and the predominantly black and Hispanic community.

RBS consultants saw a relationship among these problems and they suggested a SPERI contract for the Miltonville school district that included the following stipulations:

- Scope - All SPERI components and activities would be targeted for completion before the city's next budget hearings (June/July, 1986).

- Planning Team - The planning team would consist of the central office staff named above plus six building principals.

- Responsibilities - RBS consultants would coordinate SPERI; serve as group discussion facilitators; provide resource assistance where appropriate during research activities; summarize SPERI deliberations; and construct policy scenarios. Those on the planning team would act as representatives of the school district's administrators. They would provide input for Focused Issues Assessment and Targeted Research; assist in carrying out research activities where possible, and promote the SPERI effort among teachers, community decision-makers, and other school administrators.

- Budget - There would be no SPERI budget, per se. Instead, the superintendent agreed to pay for release time for anyone involved in SPERI and refreshments during meetings from his discretionary funds. Costs beyond these items would be considered and negotiated as they arose.

Focused Issues Assessment

Two weeks after this SPERI contract was accepted, the RBS consultants held their first focused issues assessment meeting with the planning team. As expected the discussion immediately zeroed in on the lack of adequate space and facilities in the school district and related problems. However, the team soon turned to other dilemmas such as the tendency for the better students in Miltonville to attend parochial and prep schools rather than

Miltonville's public schools. The transient student issue also was raised as were other problems associated with student mobility. The organization of the schools and their feeding patterns also was identified as a problem area as were a variety of teacher-related issues such as burnout, turnover rates, attendance, and the inability to get substitutes. As the discussion continued, the planning team divided the problems into two major areas: those somewhat external to the direct operation of schools in the district, or environmental problems; and those appearing to be internal, part and parcel of that operation.

The external problems exerting an influence on Miltonville's educational policies were problems with which school district administrators had to cope in one form or another. They had to be accounted for whenever educational decisions were made. These outside influences were:

- Problems related to the state department of education which was predisposed toward regulations and monitoring with little regard for individual district cases.
- Problems related to the community political situation which was characterized by special interest pressure, hostility, mistrust, and extreme activism on the part of some constituents and by apathy or lack of confidence and support on the part of others.
- Problems related to the socio-economic condition both in the community generally and especially among families sending their children to the public schools. It was a condition lacking many of the financial and other resources needed to support and reinforce the learning process.

The planning team noted internal problems that also influenced education in Miltonville. They were, in some cases, local manifestations of the external problems, but they were ones where Miltonville's planning team felt they could focus their efforts most productively:

- Poor facilities.
- Disjointed curriculum.
- Burned out instructional staff.
- At-risk student population.
- Non-productive district organization.
- Poor public relations.

The discussion at the next focused issues assessment meeting took an interesting turn. In testing different hypotheses as to why community support for the schools was so poor when budgets were proposed, two insightful comments were made. One related how there were people in the community who understood the school district's problems and were willing to support improved services. These people, however, did not seem to have much say in how money was spent; but they were trying to get that say. The other comment referred to Miltonville as a hotel where residents came and went and occasionally banded together temporarily for some common good. These remarks brought the discussion to consideration of what could be done to create a coalition of sympathetic clients and constituents that would be large enough to swing votes in favor of critical education budget issues. The drift of this discussion was summed up by one participant, "There is no question that this group needs a public relations campaign." From here the discussion moved to consideration of how such a campaign might look and at whom it might be aimed.

One group identified was parents. The consensus was that parents were problematic because, with a few vocal exceptions, they appeared more or less satisfied with the education their children received. And because they were satisfied they tended to be uninvolved. One goal suggested for the public relations campaign, then, was to aim it at parents to get them to demand more resources for the schools so those schools could deliver

more services to their children and the community. Another important group identified was the school board. The possibility of undertaking public relations to sway school board members, it was noted, would involve Miltonville's principals in politics--an arena that traditionally they had not entered.

The last group at whom a public relations campaign, it was suggested, might be aimed was senior citizens. Somewhere between 20 and 30 percent of Miltonville's citizens were senior citizens and there were four large senior citizen complexes in the city. These people exercised considerable clout when they voted as a block (and the perception was that they did vote as a block). It was estimated that a very small number of votes could sway the resolution of an issue (500 or fewer) and this observation underscored the power that a group like this could have if it voted as a block.

As this focused issues session concluded, the planning team recommended undertaking a public relations campaign aimed at these three groups. This recommendation seemed like a good one because, in effect, it addressed several of the problem areas they had listed earlier. The goals of such a campaign were listed:

- to increase awareness of the critical nature of the facilities problem especially as it affects quality education;
- to bring an understanding of how much better Miltonville's schools and students could be if the facilities problem was solved;
- to increase the positive involvement of parents, board members, and senior citizens in aggressively helping to solve the facilities problem; and
- to increase votes in favor of critical budget issues related to solving the facilities problem.

The next step was to begin identifying sources of information for targeted research:

- Market information related to voting patterns, issues of interest to voters, voter receptivity to the above goals, and the like.
- Information reflecting the positive condition of Miltonville's schools in comparison to other similar districts: for example, achievement levels, attendance records, program effectiveness, etc.
- Information reflecting the true negative financial, social service, education, etc., costs to Miltonville's citizens brought on by the poor conditions of the school facilities.

Targeted Research

Targeted research studies in these areas were never conducted, however. At the first targeted research meeting with the Miltonville planning team, the superintendent announced that he had been talking to board of education members who were convinced that the upcoming school budget proposals would be soundly defeated. Furthermore, he shared this opinion after having consulted with members of city council. Thus, he reasoned, the scope of the SPERI contract would need to be adjusted.

It was clear from their discussions about what to do next that this newest development had sapped the planning team's enthusiasm and energy. "These things never work" and "We might as well just roll over" were typical comments. Fearing that a delay in targeted research activities would put the SPERI effort back to where it had started, RBS consultants urged the planning team to stick with the original contract but with some timeline modification. They suggested that the rest of the spring and summer of 1986 should be devoted to data collection and analysis and that the fall of 1986 and winter of 1987 be devoted to developing and mounting the originally-proposed public relations campaign.

The planning team adopted this suggestion reluctantly and discussion turned to which of the three targeted research studies should be undertaken first: a study of voting patterns, a study of the schools' effectiveness, or a study of the larger costs of substandard school buildings. The team decided none of these would be appropriate at this time and instead they introduced a "report card" for parents as an alternative. They reasoned that this report card, a poll of parents' attitudes towards the schools, would serve a number of purposes. First, it would give a good picture of what parents liked and did not like about their children's schools. Second, such a poll would show specifically what aspects of Miltonville's schools needed improvement according to parents. Third, it would provide a list of positive aspects of the schools on which a public relations campaign could focus. Lastly, it would help planning team members identify parents who supported the schools -- those who gave the best grades on the report card -- and who would be willing to lobby for the school budget, perhaps.

RBS consultants agreed to develop the report card and a methodology for distributing it, collecting it, and summarizing its results. For their part, the planning team agreed to smooth the way at their schools for distribution and collection of the report card. They also agreed to create lists, by school, of parents they already knew to be supportive of Miltonville's educational system. These parents were to be the first ones approached as potential lobbyists.

A draft of the parent report card was submitted along with a fairly detailed plan for distribution and collection. However, the planning team rejected both along with the entire idea of polling district parents. They

also discarded their original idea to mount a combination public relations/-lobbying campaign to insure a favorable school budget. They now felt that a district wide public relations effort would probably not succeed. They seemed nervous about "fringe" elements in the community co-opting the report card poll and were concerned that an overly negative review would merely feed the fires of their political adversaries. Furthermore, they did not feel comfortable, as educators, becoming involved in a public relations campaign.

Finally, they did not want to lobby beyond their own local community. They did not feel confident enough in the effectiveness of other district schools to lobby for these other schools even as part of a district-wide effort. These decisions signaled the end of RBS' formal SPERI effort in Miltonville.

Postscript

The following fall the superintendent informally notified RBS consultants of his plans to have all of his principals survey parents on "Open House" night. His intention was to use the survey to "set the stage for cooperative interactions" on a school-by-school basis. The survey was to ask for parents' opinions on selected, specific issues which principals felt they could control and modify locally without a major district-wide effort. Exam schedules, homework policies, the school calendar, and all day kindergarten were among the issues on the survey. Oddly enough though, the condition of school facilities and possible solutions to the facilities problems also were to be included. In subsequent interviews, the superintendent noted that the SPERI experience -- although not brought to

closure -- was a valuable one for his principals and supervisors. Despite the truncation of the process, he said his administrative team benefited because they learned problem-clarification techniques and a problem-solving framework that they could use to meet all district challenges head-on.

Thus, even though there did not seem to be much of substance accomplished during RBS' involvement, the district administration seemed to be moving ahead to resolve some of its problems. Moreover, both the administration and most of the planning team were satisfied merely to have had the opportunity to learn the SPERI processes and exchange their perspectives on district problems.

Pine Lane Elementary School

Pine Lane Elementary School is one of five elementary schools in the Lakeside school district. The district itself is small--5900 students attending five elementary schools, one junior high, and one high school. Despite this, the state education agency considers Lakeside to be an urban district. This status entitles the district to receive the special assistance and aid that is distributed to cities with large percentages of minority, low income, and at-risk students.

Pine Lane is the largest elementary school in the district with about seven hundred students, sixty teachers, one vice-principal, and one principal. Forty-two percent of Pine Lane's students are white, thirty percent are Hispanic, and twenty-eight percent are black. One quarter of the students at Pine Lane are considered low-income; that is, they are eligible for free lunches. All students are bussed to the school: the white students from all areas of Lakeside; most of the blacks and Hispanics from an area of the city called the "fourth street ghetto" by the largely white school staff.

Like so many of its Northeastern counterparts, Lakeside has changed demographically over the last ten years. Once a rather exclusive resort and retirement community, the city has become more and more like any other city. Large numbers of blacks and Hispanics have moved in joining--and in some cases replacing--the largely middle class, white population. Teachers refer to Lakeside's current population as a majority of minorities.

Pine Lane Elementary's first contact with RBS consultants came in the early spring of 1986 when the principal requested planning assistance for

"increasing academic learning time" at the school. In response, RBS consultants suggested that the school undertake strategic planning and they introduced the SPERI system.

Planning to Plan

At the first meeting RBS staff sought the principal's analysis of Pine Lane school's needs. At the outset the principal seemed convinced that increased learning time was his major need. But as he described his situation he and the consultants began seeing other, broader areas of need including staff development, human relations training, staffing and rostering alternatives, and more creative approaches to student discipline. As the discussion kept branching to include these new areas, the principal recognized that his planning effort required a broader focus, more structure, and a planning team. He invited the RBS consultants to return to outline SPERI to members of his staff and to help him negotiate a strategic planning contract with them.

For this second meeting the principal assembled a team of six teachers who he called "the movers and shakers." To him they were clearly teachers with influence and prestige among their peers. Also he saw them as teachers he could count on to take on extra planning responsibilities, carry them out effectively, and produce positive results. They were staff he felt he could trust, as well. The principal invited a school district liaison to attend this meeting, too.

RBS consultants explained the SPERI system and, after answering some technical questions, they proposed the following as Pine Lane's SPERI contract:

- Scope - All SPERI components and activities would be completed before the end of the school year (June 1986).

- Planning Team - The planning team would consist of twelve Pine Lane staff members: the six teachers present, the principal, two additional black teachers (all of the six were white as is the principal), the vice principal, one non-certificated staff member, and the district liaison. (The principal agreed to try to involve those listed who were not present.)

- Responsibilities - RBS consultants would coordinate SPERI, develop research designs and instruments as necessary, analyze and summarize research information, and construct policy scenarios. The teachers on the planning team would serve as representatives of the school staff at large. They would keep staff informed about SPERI and the progress of SPERI activities, get their input during the issues identification phase, conduct in-school research as necessary, and build support for the SPERI effort among all staff. The administrators on the planning team would accept the same responsibilities as the teachers plus they would provide administrative support so the SPERI effort would run smoothly (e.g., insure time for meetings, allow data collection activities, take care of substitutes, encourage and reward participation, etc.). The district liaison would participate in issues identification and report Pine Lane's SPERI activities in the best possible light to the superintendent.

- Budget--The SPERI effort would have a small budget. The money in it would be used for substitutes (if they were needed), refreshments at meetings, and miscellaneous expenses that might come up.

After some discussion, all agreed to the contract and those present began the Focused Issues Assessment phase.

Focused Issues Assessment

RBS consultants began Pine Lane's focused issues assessment by asking those present at this first meeting to analyze their situation: express what they personally saw as the strengths and weaknesses of the school and then test their personal opinions against what others--not present--might say. The point of departure for this discussion was the results of an informal survey of teachers taken by the principal right after RBS' first meeting with him.

From this analysis of the Pine Lane situation, came a list of seven issue areas that those present felt they could take on without massive

assistance from outside agencies. That is, they were issues where the planning team felt the school's staff was in control of improvement. The issue areas were:

- paperwork
- curriculum
- communication
- bus schedules
- student discipline
- public relations
- negative/apathetic student attitudes.

Additional discussion and a priority-ranking exercise revealed that poor student discipline and negative/apathetic student attitudes toward school were the issues of primary concern to this group. And they were unanimous in assigning top priority to these problems. There was less unanimity, however, about the root causes of the problems. In fact, there was some confusion over what, specifically, was meant by the phrases "poor student discipline" and "negative/apathetic attitudes." As this meeting came to an end, it was suggested that the planning team members report the conclusions of this discussion to their colleagues, get informal input from them about the issues, and come to the next meeting ready to use this input to complete this phase of SPERI.

At the next meeting, the focused issues assessment took an unexpected turn. During a discussion in which planning team members were asked to specify characteristics of those students considered to have discipline or attitude problems, a significant fact came to light: nearly every single student considered to have these problems was in one section--a section

comprised entirely of "low achievers." This revelation surprised everyone. It led to a lengthy discussion of the reasons for this situation.

This discussion was even more revealing as it uncovered a long-standing school district tracking policy. Students were assigned to academic levels (i.e., groups) according to scores they received on a standardized reading test taken in second grade. Based on this score they were grouped as 1's, 2's, 3's, or 4's and they stayed in these groups throughout elementary school. At Pine Lane, the 1's were all together in the same classes and these classes contained most of the students with discipline and attitude problems. There were a few students with these problems among the 2 classes, fewer still among the 3 classes, and virtually none among students in the highest group--the 4 classes.

Once laid out like this, these facts made the planning team's priorities obvious. First, they wanted to find out whether others on Pine Lane's faculty had made the connection between the tracking policies and the discipline problems. Then they wanted to see to what degree poor discipline was contributing to staff dissatisfaction. These they named as the principle emphases for their research agenda. Also, they wanted to test the feasibility and desirability of changing the tracking policy (or at least modifying it at Pine Lane). Lastly, they wanted to attack the immediate problem of dealing constructively with those students with discipline or attitude problems who become disruptive.

Targeted Research

Pine Lane's Targeted Research phase branched into two directions. The first was internal. It involved administering a survey,

developed by RBS consultants in cooperation with the planning team, to all Pine Lane staff. The survey was to obtain staff views in three areas:

- factors that most contributed to discipline problems at Pine Lane;
- how severe the discipline problems were at Pine Lane in comparison to other schools; and
- whether the Pine Lane staff were generally satisfied with the nature of their working conditions and still committed to excellence at the school.

The second direction Targeted Research took was external: an environmental scan. RBS consultants searched the educational literature that dealt with research, theory, and practices related to student grouping and tracking. At the same time Pine Lane's two administrators informally polled other district administrators to ascertain their satisfaction with the present tracking system and to find out whether these other administrators believed it exacerbated their school's discipline problems. In addition, the principal and the district liaison began investigating the possibility of changing the district tracking policy. This environmental scan had four goals:

- to provide research support for changing the present tracking system;
- to provide a number of practical, proven alternatives to the present tracking system;
- to find out if the present tracking system led to discipline problems in other Lakeview schools; and
- to see if a district-wide campaign to alter the present tracking system was feasible.

The survey of Pine Lane's staff showed that the other staff at the school indeed saw the tracking system as one of the causes of their student discipline problems. In fact, there was overwhelming consensus among the

staff that it was the single most significant cause. It was seen as far more significant than the one in second place, absence of a counselor.

The tracking system was seen as causing discipline problems in other Lakeview schools, too, according to the environmental scan. The consensus among others in other schools was not so overwhelming, however. Beyond this, the scan revealed that there was little support among other administrators in the other Lakeview Schools to work to change the district's tracking policy.

These results were summarized and were used to create future scenarios for Pine Lane. This was done by RBS consultants working with Pine Lane's principal and vice-principal.

Scenario #1: Changing the district tracking policy.

> With some pressure from the Pine Lane principal and his colleagues, the district would alter its tracking policy on its own, thereby enabling Pine Lane to create heterogeneous student groupings. This would ease the problem by mingling disruptive low-achieving students with average and high achievers who were not disruptive. The latter students would act as role models academically as well as in terms of their deportment. Some teachers (ones who currently had only high achieving classes) would be upset at this change; but they would be able to handle the challenge and the overall impact on staff morale and achievement among the lower groups would be extremely positive.

This scenario seemed unlikely. Although many principals in the district thought the tracking system helped create discipline problems, not all did. And none felt the problem was severe enough for them to fight district policy. The district adopted the policy in order to demonstrate to state monitors that student achievement, overall, was high. Because achievement was reported as an average, and because there were more students in the higher groups than in the lower, district-wide achievement

levels always appeared high. So the district office would not be inclined to alter the policy. Furthermore, because this policy seemed to be as much political as educational, no principal wanted to antagonize district staff over it.

Scenario #2: Making in-school adjustments

> Pine Lane would make internal organizational changes that would reduce the negative effects of the district tracking system without confronting district policy head-on. For example, teachers might be rotated so that they taught different sections different years. Initially this would upset teachers who always have taught high-achievers. In the long run, however, rotation would benefit all teachers as they learned to broaden and adapt their instructional approaches to suit all students. All students likewise would benefit by being exposed to different instructional techniques. Also, the poor morale associated with continually having to deal with problem children would improve as teachers rotated.
>
> To ease the trauma of this organizational change Pine Lane would provide two support mechanisms for teachers. One would be a counselor specifically designated to develop ways of dealing with chronically disruptive students. The counselor could run a "cool out" program that would help foster pro-social behavior, for instance.
>
> The other support mechanism would be a program of professional development for Pine Lane staff. The program would couple training in alternative discipline procedures with information about alternative instructional approaches. Its objectives would be to show teachers how to work effectively with the disruptive low achievers while moving them into higher groups.

This scenario could be accomplished. Its success hinged primarily on whether the principal could obtain the resources needed to hire another staff person--the counselor--and to sponsor a staff development program. To realize this scenario the principal needed the autonomy to be able to hire an extremely competent and effective counselor. Also the staff development program needed to be effective and motivating. In addition, all staff had to be convinced to participate in these organizational

changes and associated activities. Lastly, district level administrators could not prevent these changes from occurring; that is they had to see them as beneficial, or at least as not threatening the achievement results they report to the state monitors.

Scenario #3: Doing nothing

> Pine Lane staff would carry on as usual, coping with the discipline problems as they had been. This course of action probably would lower teacher morale and cause a considerable amount burnout. A number of staff would resign and many of those who did not would lose their enthusiasm and commitment. The overall discipline situation would not improve and perhaps become worse. The effects would spread and begin to show in reduced achievement among Pine Lane's students.
>
> Eventually, the situation would draw the attention of the district staff. If similar scenarios were being played out in other schools in the district and if district staff involved local school staff in analyzing the causes, the district's tracking system might be re-evaluated. Subsequently, it might be changed.

There was about an even chance that this scenario would come to pass if, for some reason, further attempts to address the problem were frustrated: for instance, if the principal did not follow through; or if the district constrainted the principal so he could not follow through. Following this scenario probably would cause the district to change its educationally unsound tracking system. But there was no guarantee, and there would be a very high human cost in the meantime.

The principal and vice-principal reviewed the three scenarios. They rejected the third outright. They discussed the first and decided they were not willing to risk the political fallout of trying to reverse an apparently effective district policy. Nor did they think it wise to commit their school's staff to such a politically charged effort. This left alternative

scenario number two; and, with the help of RBS consultants, they formulated a mission reflecting this option. The mission was expressed graphically (Figure One). Although its major emphasis was attention to student discipline, it was constructed to include increased academic learning time (the principal's original interest) and increased student achievement (to make it conform to school district goals).

Figure One

MISSION FOR PINE LANE
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS

counseling			
in-service	discipline	increased academic learning time	increased student achievement
alternative grouping		in-service	

Targeted Policy Analysis

The final phase of SPERI at Pine Lane was carried out with little assistance from RBS. RBS consultants explained some policy analysis procedures to Pine Lane administrators, but they had no real involvement in the deliberations. However, in the fall of 1986, the principal shared the following outcomes with them:

- A full-time counselor had been hired. The principal had reallocated existing resources and obtained additional resources to accomplish this. Furthermore, he had been given complete control over the interviewing and selection process. He, his assistant, and representatives from the planning team were working with the counselor on a program aimed at chronically disruptive students.

- A series of staff development workshops had been initiated. Again, the principal had reallocated and obtained resources to finance this professional development effort. To insure relevance he had put members of the planning team in charge of the workshops. They polled staff for topics, investigated delivery options, and designed the workshops. The first in the series was a workshop on assertive discipline.

- A set of procedures for understanding and dealing with disruptive students was adopted and incorporated into the staff manual. A parallel set of "expectations for student behavior" was adopted, put into the student handbook, and distributed to students and parents. Guidelines for using alternative instructional techniques to prevent discipline problems also were developed and distributed to teachers. The mission graphic (above) was attached to all this material.

These outcomes suggest that a good deal of time and energy went into policy analysis and reformulation at Pine Lane. Whether it was the principal, the planning team, or some combination is unknown. What is known is that because they are energetic, open-minded, and forward-thinking, the Pine Lane Elementary School staff were able to utilize SPERI to discover and successfully begin meeting a major improvement need at their school.

Sydney School District

The Sydney School District is in a small northeastern city. There are about 6,000 students enrolled in Sydney's 11 schools (seven K-4 elementary, two 5-8 middle, one high school, and one center for adults). The city population is a fairly even mixture of white, black, and Hispanic, but only about 14 percent of the city's whites and 13 percent of its blacks send their children to the public schools. Most of the public school students are Hispanic (about 23 percent) and the Sydney schools all have fairly large bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

On the whole, Sydney students do not score well on state-mandated graduation tests for reading, mathematics, and writing. Only one-third of Sydney's high school students passed all three subtests. Because of this poor performance the Sydney School District has been put on probation by the state department of education and must raise these passing rates to 75 percent by the end of 1988.

Sydney also has a student mobility problem which may be contributing to the low achievement levels. It seems a large portion of Sydney's students are continually on-the-move. It was estimated that in 1985-1986 as many as a third transferred at least once during the school year: in or out of the district or from school to school within the district. Many of these students transferred more than once during the year. One second grader had entered and left different Sydney schools seven times in two years.

Sydney's superintendent called on RBS consultants in late 1986 to help him a plan to mobilize his staff and community to address two questions:

- The Mobility Question. What was the extent of student transfers in and out of and among Sydney's schools and to what degree did it have an impact on graduation test achievement levels in Sydney?

- The Professional Development Question. What should be the content and approach of a professional development program that could help school district administrators institute changes that would result in higher graduation test scores?

RBS suggested SPERI as a way to develop such a plan.

Planning to Plan

There were two pre-planning meetings, and both included the superintendent, his assistant, and three RBS consultants. At these meetings, the superintendent described the Sydney schools and students in detail and he and his assistant outlined what they wanted RBS consultants to do. First they wanted RBS to help their administrative team plan their staff development experiences for the coming year. This administrative team consisted of principals, vice-principals, supervisor's, directors of special programs, and central office personnel. It numbered thirty-five. Second, they wanted RBS to help them assess, organize, and streamline currently-available school district information on student mobility. From this would come an evaluation of these data and, perhaps, recommendations for instituting data-collection procedures that would lead to better school district understanding of the impact of student mobility.

RBS consultants saw these as two separate SPERI efforts and suggested a SPERI contract that branched in certain respects:

- Scope - The SPERI staff development planning effort would be completed by Christmas 1986 to enable administrators to complete their staff development before the end of the school year. The SPERI mobility study effort would be completed in phases: focused

issues and creation of a targeted research design by early spring 1987; data collection and array by the end of the 1987 school year; scenario development and policy recommendations by fall of 1987.

- Planning Team - For the staff development effort, the planning team would consist of the district administrative team--building administrators, directors, and supervisors. The SPERI mobility study effort planning team would be the superintendent, assistant superintendent, an elementary school principal, and the director of federal and state programs.

- Responsibilities - RBS consultants would coordinate both SPERI efforts, act as discussion facilitators, summarize discussions, and construct policy scenarios. For the staff development effort, they would collect information about alternative programs in management and educational development for the administrative team. The planning team would follow-up and evaluate these alternatives. For the mobility study effort, RBS consultants would develop research designs and instruments, coordinate data collection and analysis activities, and summarize the data. The planning team would see to it that the data was made available at the local schools, and scrutinize data sets for accuracy and relevance.

- Budget - Both SPERI efforts would have a budget to cover RBS consultant costs, data collection and processing costs, the cost of substitute staff when needed, refreshments and lunches, and travel costs.

Focused Issues Assessment - Staff Development Planning

To facilitate the planning of professional development by the Sydney administrative team, RBS designed three planning sessions. The sessions were intended to help the administrative team identify their priorities and goals for professional development and to outline a delivery system for that development which addressed issues of time, location, resources, and the like.

In the first session, several team members formulated a mission statement. During most of the second session--conducted two weeks later--the administrative team worked smoothly and efficiently to list and prioritize staff development goals. Approximately three quarters of the way through this session, however, participants began raising questions about

the results they were producing. Some wondered whether they were avoiding "controversial issues" in planning their professional development. In the discussion that followed, several "controversial issues" surfaced, but two seemed to dominate the discussion: poor communication among administrative team members, both horizontally and vertically; and lack of empathy among members of the administrative team for each others' difficulties and dilemmas.

RBS staff saw this discussion as valuable because it signaled the beginning of the kind of frank discussion needed to bring the administrative team to a point where it could design professional development experiences that dealt with Sydney's real needs and that focused on specific skills to meet these needs. Most members of the administrative team saw the discussion the same way. Unfortunately, the discussion fell short of resolution as time ran out on that second session.

It was hoped that the third session--scheduled for the following month--would begin where the second left off. Participants seemed willing to carry on the second session's discussions and they agreed to work hard in a densely packed third session not only to reach closure on this "controversial issues" discussion but also to make key decisions about the timing, location, content and structure of their professional development experiences. Neither of these goals were met.

A late start packed the agenda even more densely and an attempt to resurrect the previous session's discussion met with a luke-warm response from participants. They seemed to back away from their willingness to confront the specific "controversial issues" raised at the previous session, preferring instead to talk more generally about issues like

"communication" and "time management." Moreover, the discussion rambled with little focus and few actively participating in it. The discussion did not reach closure and key decisions were never reached.

Targeted Research -- Staff Development Planning

As originally conceived, the targeted research phase of Sydney's staff development planning effort was to consist of the following activities:

- an investigation and evaluation of alternative staff development topics, programs, and delivery systems; and
- a survey of potential staff development participants to ascertain most appropriate topics, program(s), delivery systems, and schedule(s).

However, considering the stalemate RBS consultants saw at this point in focused issues phase, they felt that the administrative team was not prepared to move into targeted research. Instead, they offered three alternative scenarios for moving the administrative team beyond its current bottleneck:

- Appoint or elect a small committee from among the administrative team to plan specific staff development activities. Insist that they keep contact with the rest of the team to make sure their planning stays in tune with the larger group. Give them release time to carry out the planning and give them control of a portion of the district's professional development budget. This would encourage their commitment while sending them the message that they are indeed responsible.
- Hire a consultant group to design, develop, and deliver a program of professional development. Members of the administrative team should be assigned to work with such a group to insure relevance.
- Postpone professional development planning activities in favor of structured group meetings of the entire administrative team. The goals of these meetings would be to encourage further exploration of the "controversial issues," to work on increasing communication among team members, and to develop their sense of being a team with a single mission and common goals. These meetings should rely on outside facilitators to guide and channel discussion toward these goals.

Tailored Policy Analysis -- Staff Development Planning

With the submission of these three scenarios, RBS consultants finished their formal involvement with the Sydney administrative team and its staff development planning effort. So they were not part of any subsequent policy analysis in the district.

Three months later the superintendent informed RBS consultants that he, his assistant, and selected members of the administrative team, in fact, had carried out a policy analysis on their own. In the course of this analysis, they chose to create a fourth scenario rather than use any of the three submitted by RBS. This scenario, which they currently were following, involved using the SPERI process to create a coordinated staff development plan for all professional staff in the district: administrators, supervisors, and teachers. The administrative team had conducted a focused issues assessment session to arrive at district-wide staff development issues. From this session came a list of issues -- including leadership, instructional improvement, and school climate -- that team members felt were key ones. They turned this list into a survey and distributed it to all professional staff to find out professional development priorities across the district. Both the district administrative team and newly created, local school teams were analyzing the results of the survey with the intention of creating not only district level staff development scenarios but also ones for each school. From these would come policy recommendations and finally operational action plans for staff development at the school and district level. Their target was to complete action planning by the end of the school year and begin their programs at the start of the next school year.

Focused Issues Assessment -- Mobility Study

While one group of RBS consultants worked with Sydney district administrative team on staff development planning, another worked directly with the superintendent and his associate. The focus of this work was student mobility in the district: How great was it? How did it affect student achievement scores?

At the first focused issues assessment session dealing with student mobility in Sydney, a great many issues were discussed, but six seemed to be most pressing:

- Do some sections of the community have higher mobility than others? (e.g., Do the students living in the four housing projects have greater stability? Do single-parent Hispanic students transfer more?)
- What proportion of the students leave and re-enter the schools more than once a year?
- Are students who are not living with parents of origin more mobile than those living with parents of origin?
- Do students who transfer into the district come less academically prepared than those who have seen some stability in the system? Are students who transfer out to private schools more academically prepared than those who remain?
- Are students who are more mobile performing at a lower level than students who are not mobile?

Recognizing that the SPERI contract limited time and resources, however, the superintendent and the RBS consultants determined that the Targeted Research phase should concentrate on the last two issues--the ones dealing most directly with the impact of mobility on student academic performance. This decision was made at another focused issues assessment session which was conducted by telephone.

Targeted Research Study -- Mobility Study

Having identified these two issues, RBS consultants then developed a research design for a targeted research study. The design was based on transcript information from 375 students of the 1989 class in Sydney's high school.

Of particular interest for the study was the students' movements into and out of the district and between schools within the district as well as the effect this mobility might have on their academic performance. The following information, kindergarten through ninth grade, was taken from the 375 students' transcript files:

- family situation (e.g., configuration, SES, geographic location)
- language spoken at home
- number of address changes
- number of years in a bilingual program
- attendance data by grade
- transfer data by grade (to and from Sydney)
- number of transfers per year
- behavior data (based on grades in deportment)
- performance data (CAT scores, IQ, other standardized local and state test results)

Using these data, five hypotheses were tested with respect to home and school factors:

H1: The greater the number of consecutive years a student is enrolled in the Sydney school district, the better the student's performance will be on the state standardized test.

H2: The higher a student's average attendance the better the student's performance will be on the state standardized test.

H3: The better a student's classroom behavior, the better the student's performance will be on the state standardized test.

H4: A student with both parents present in the household will have better performance on the state standardized test.

H5: The more frequently English is spoken at home, the better a student's performance will be on the state standardized test.

A team consisting of RBS consultants and high school guidance department staff collected relevant data as noted above. Statistical analysis of the data, conducted by the RBS consultants, revealed that of the five hypothesized factors, four (number of years in the district, behavior, home language, and attendance) proved to have a statistically significant effect on student performance. Some of these variables, it was reasoned, the district could influence; others probably fell beyond the district's domain.

Bearing this in mind, the RBS consultants proposed four scenarios that would help answer some of the problems uncovered by the targeted research study.

Scenario #1: Focus Attention on Middle School Students

Sydney's student population is very mobile and this mobility affects student performance. Middle school seems to be a critical point both because of the numbers of students transferring in and because it is where students must make the grade in order to succeed later on. (The state standardized test is first given to ninth graders.) The district should target students entering or re-entering the system in middle school for special remediation. Moreover, students entering Sydney's Middle Schools should be screened carefully to make sure they are placed at a grade level that is commensurate with their abilities. In addition, the middle school curriculum should be examined and, if necessary, aligned more closely to the state test. Lastly, current middle school instructional approaches should be evaluated to see if they meet the needs of a student population of widely diversified abilities and educational backgrounds.

Scenario #2: Focus Attention on Students with Poor Behavior

Students with poor behavior score poorly on the state test. Poor behavior has many causes; these should be investigated and attended to, if possible. More significantly, there is evidence that often poor behavior is linked to low expectations, mediocre instructional delivery, and inappropriate instructional programs. These three areas should be examined in the Sydney schools--especially for students who seem to be chronic behavior problems--to ascertain whether poorly behaved students receive the same quality of education as their well-behaved peers.

Scenario #3: Focus Attention on Student Attendance

Students who are in school more, spend more time on task, learn more, and consequently, score higher on the state test. The district should examine the causes of poor student attendance patterns in the schools where they occur. The programs and instruction in these schools also should be examined to see if they can be adjusted to encourage better attendance. Finally, where called for, programs targeted specifically at students with poor attendance should be installed.

Scenario #4: Focus Attention on Language Spoken in the Home

A large number of Sydney's students come from Hispanic families. Those who speak at least some English in their homes score higher on the state test. All parents should be made aware of this correlation and those who speak little or no English at home should be encouraged to begin. Beyond this, the district should establish--in cooperation with community service agencies--a program to provide English instruction for those parents who need it.

RBS consultants, along with the superintendent, presented these scenarios to the Sydney Board of Education. The Board took them under advisement and resolved to consider them in light of current rules, regulations, and policies.

Tailored Policy Analysis -- Mobility Study

RBS' formal role in this portion of the SPERI process ended with the presentation to the Sydney Board of Education. There has been no further contact with the Board or the superintendent to find out whether any policy determinations have been made. It is assumed, however, that the four proposed scenarios still are under consideration and that they soon will be acted upon.

Conclusions

It seems clear that for these three cases, the SPERI system worked. In all three situations, RBS' clients were able to identify significant issues facing their school or district, examine them critically, and put them in priority order according to their importance and urgency. Also, it seems that in all three cases, the process was brought to satisfactory closure -- at least from the clients' point of view. From RBS' point of view, however, there was great variation in both SPERI implementation and the results produced by the process.

In initiating SPERI, RBS consultants expected that the process -- a rational one -- would be followed much as it had been designed. Moreover, there was an expectation that once the clients had carried out the SPERI process, they would use the results to make rationally-arrived-at, appropriate policy adjustments. Yet, neither Miltonville nor Sydney adhered very closely to the SPERI process. Nor did either end up with the kind of definite, specific policy decisions that the SPERI developers had envisioned as the outcomes of the process. Likewise at Pine Lane, even though the clients followed the SPERI design pretty faithfully, their policy decisions were not the kind the SPERI developers had hoped they would make.

Examining this variety as regards the implementation and outcomes of SPERI in these three cases has brought us to two conclusions that we feel are significant for our further use of the SPERI system to help educators carry out strategic planning. First, local context will cause variations in the implementation and outcomes of the system. For us, the following contextual factors seemed to be particularly influential:

- The history of prior attempts to plan and carry out improvement projects. Miltonville was a school district where much had been tried, but little had been accomplished. Over the years, the administrators, reacting to their perceptions of community hostility to their efforts, had developed a "no can do" mentality. They were easily convinced of the futility of attempting improvements that required community input and support. Thus, they were quickly discouraged when it was even hinted that their proposed budget would be defeated. In contrast, the Pine Lane teachers had been involved in a number of successful improvement efforts and were confident that this newest effort would work. In Sydney, one set of planners, those working on the mobility issue, had attacked other issues of similar magnitude before; and although they had not totally eliminated them, they had had enough success in addressing them to feel fairly confident that their efforts would bear some fruit.

- The priority that the focal point of the planning process has for all concerned. As an example, at Pine Lane all the teachers and administrators realized the importance of planning ways to alleviate their discipline problems and to adjust the tracking system. Likewise, in Sydney there was a strong consensus among administrators, teachers and school board members that student mobility was a severe problem that needed clarification and attention. There was no similar consensus concerning staff development among Sydney's administrative planning team so they tended to treat it less seriously than the mobility issue. Also, those who did not see it as a high priority tended to be less committed to it than those who did. There was a similar lack of consensus about and commitment to the importance of a community lobbying effort among the members of Miltonville's planning team.

- The degree of linkage, communication, and trust among planners. Pine Lane planners were tightly linked, communicated well with each other, and trusted each other sufficiently to encourage candor. This, in turn, enabled them to focus on the task at hand and work productively without having to worry much about politics. (This was not the case when their deliberations led them to see a need to get involved with district level policies: they backed away from this.) One also saw this kind of tight linkage, communication and trust among the Sydney planners dealing with the mobility issue; and they too seemed to work productively. This was not the case in Miltonville or among the Sydney staff development planning team. These two groups were large and diverse enough that there existed little natural linkage and communication. And the circumstances under which they were brought together did not encourage the development of linkage or communication. Moreover, the members of the larger Sydney and Miltonville planning groups did not trust each other enough to be frank in their discussions or to offer support beyond the group when called for (as was the case when the Miltonville administrators refused to lobby anywhere except in their own school community).

- The degree to which either the planning task or the policies that will be (potentially) affected required those involved to go against their customary roles or ways of doing things. As noted above, Pine Lane teachers were used to being part of the decision process in the school and they did it enthusiastically and productively with openness and trust among their colleagues at the school. They drew the line at going beyond this to district level decision activities. They did not see it as their role or their responsibility. They also had never done it before and they suspected that it might negatively affect them professionally. In Miltonville, this too was the planning team's attitude, but about the whole planning task. They had done very little of it for district-wide issues; they had done very little of it with the others in the group; and they did not see it as an appropriate task for themselves. Moreover, they were suspicious that their input might haunt them professionally later. The situation was more or less the same among Sydney's staff development planners; but not among those working on the mobility issue. The latter saw planning as their job -- at least for this issue -- and they had had some experience working together on the mobility question before. Here again, however, the next level of involvement was a line not to be crossed. Once they presented their findings to the board of education they felt they were done. They did not see making policy recommendations as an activity they should undertake. They had never done it before and they were not going to do it now.

Thus, although the SPERI system was not followed as RBS would have wanted and although it did not produce the kinds of outcomes we would have liked to have seen in these three cases, the clients were satisfied. More importantly, they thought the system had helped them identify, clarify, and prioritize their most signficant issues. And they believed that the SPERI system was responsible, in part at least, for putting them on the road to developing policy alternatives for addressing these issues.

So the second lesson we learned from our experiences in these cases is to be flexible. We have learned that a rational planning/decision making paradigm such as SPERI is useful -- perhaps even vital -- for effective planning, but it does not control the planning process. Neither the clients nor their local contextual conditions will let that happen. The

conditions and the clients will cause adaptations. Adaptations make both the process itself and its outcomes more appropriate and more helpful for the clients. This is the real proof of the planning process.

References

Amara, R. (1980). A framework for corporate strategic planning: Philosophy, process, and practice. (Paper p-97). Menlo Park, CA: Institute for the Future.

Ballard, S. C. & James, T. E. (1983). Participatory research and utilization in the technology assessment process: Issues and recommendations. Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization, 4(3), 409-427.

Beyer, M. & & Trice, H. M. (1987). How an organization's rites reveal its culture. Organizational dynamics, Spring 5-24.

Bickel, E. (1983). Effective schools: Knowledge, dissemination, inquiry. Educational Research: 12(4) 3-5.

Broms, H. & Gahmberg, H. (1983). Communication to self in organizations and cultures. Administrative science quarterly, 28( ), 482-495.

Camillus, J. C. (1986). Strategic planning and management control. Lexington, MA: Lexington, books.

Cleveland, T. B. (1981). Strategy formulation: Environment, organizational, and individual variables affecting choice of approach. Doctoral dissertation, University of Washington.

Cope, R. G. (1981). Strategic planning, management, and decision-making. AAHE-ERIC/Higher Education Research Report No. 9. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

Corbett, H. D., Dawson, J. A. & Firestone, W. A. (1984). School context and school change: Implications for effective planning. New York: Teachers College Press.

Crandall, D. P. and Associates. (1982). People, policies, and practices: Examining the chain of school improvement. Andover, MA: the NETWORK, Inc.

D'Amico, J. J. (1988). Strategic planning for educational reform and improvement. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Better Schools, Inc.

Dawson, J. A. & D'Amico. (1985). Involving program staff in evaluation studies: A strategy for increasing information use and enriching the data base. Evaluation Review, 9(2), 172-188.

Deal, E. (1984). Searching for the wizard: The quest for excellence in education. Issues in Education. 11(1), 56-67.

Deal, T. E. & Kennedy, A. A. (1982). Corporate cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Ecker, M. (1986). A site level action plan: The bottom-up part of strategic planning. Thrust. 16(2), 17-18.

Fullan, M. (1982). The meaning of educational change. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gold, N. (1983). Stakeholder and program evaluation: Characterizations and reflections. In A. S. Bryk (Ed.), Stakeholder-based evaluation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Halachmi, A. (1986). Strategic planning and management? Not necessarily. In Holzer, M. & Halachmi, A. (Eds.). Public Productivity Review.

Horner, D. G. (1979). Strategic planning for higher education. Management Focus. San Francisco, CA: Peat, Marwick, Mitchel & Co.

Hurst, D. K. (1986). Why strategic management is bankrupt. Organizational Dynamics. Autumn, 1986. 5-27.

Kirst, M. W. & Meister, R. (1985). Turbulence in American secondary schools: What reforms last? Curriculum Inquiry. 15(2). 169-186.

Lilly, E. R. (1984). Boards of education and system-wide strategic planning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 248 613).

Lindbloom, E. & Cohen, D. K. (1979). Useable Knowledge. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Mackinder, H. (1919). The geographic pivot of history. In Mackinder, H. (Ed.). The scope and methods of geography. London: The Royal Geographic Society.

Mahan, A. (1890). The influence of sea power on history, 1660-1783. Boston: Little, Brown.

Oberhammer, M. (1986). Training the team. Training and Development Journal. 40(8). 70-72.

O'Conner, R. (1978). Planning under uncertainty: Multiple scenarios and contingency planning. New York: Conference Board.

Pearce, J. A., II & Robinson, R. B., Jr. (1982). Strategic Management. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc.

Quinn, J. B. (1980). Strategies for change: Logical incrementalism. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc.

Raze, N. (1986). Overview of strategic planning. Redwood City, CA: San Mateo County Office of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction No. EDZ7086).

Schendel, D. E. & Hatten, K. J. (1972). Strategic planning and higher education: Some concepts, problems, and opportunities. (Reprint #442). Lafayette, IN.: Institute for Research in the Behavioral, Economic, and Management Sciences, Purdue University.

Selltiz, C. Wrightsman, L. S., Cook, S. W. (1976). Research methods in social relations. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Sirotnik, K. A. & Oakes, J. (Eds.). (1986). Critical perspectives on the organization and improvement of schooling. Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff.

Steiner, G. A. (1979). Strategic planning: What every manager must know. New York: The Free Press.

Von Neumann, J. & Morgenstern, O. (1947). Theory of games and economic behavior. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Walter, J. E. (1983). Planning without goals: A heuristic application of a model. The Urban Review. 15(4). 217-228.

Webster, W. E. (1985). Operationalizing the planning process in schools: A new look. Planning and Changing. 16(2). 82-87.

Weiss, C. (1980). Knowledge creep and decision accretion. Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization. 1(3)381-404.

Wilkinson, G. W. (1986). Strategic planning in the voluntary sector in Gardner, J. R., Rachlin, R. & Sweeny, H. W. A. (Eds.). Handbook of strategic planning. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Yin, K. (1984). Case study research: Design and Methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.